UNITED NATIONS **DP**

Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

DP/1993/SR.17
24 August 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GOVERNING COUNCIL

Fortieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 17th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 7 June 1993, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. SERRATE CUELLAR (Bolivia)
(Vice-President)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATOR FOR 1992 AND PROGRAMME-LEVEL ACTIVITIES (continued) (DP/1993/10 and Add.1-5)

1. Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said that it was vital to redirect development cooperation to take account of the sweeping changes taking place throughout the world, by making good use of the opportunities offered by major global conferences. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio had addressed the need for environment and development policy to take into account considerations of sustainability, while the International Conference on Population and Development to be held in 1994 would mark another important step forming a link between the Earth Summit and the World Summit for Social Development and the World Conference on Women to be held in 1995. The theme common to all the conferences was the importance of the human being as the central concern and the primary mover of development. UNDP had a crucial role to play in redirecting development cooperation without losing sight of the relevance of long-standing development issues such as finance and debt, trade reform, technology development and transfer, poverty alleviation and social development.

2. While Member States were discussing, at the intergovernmental level, the introduction of more effective structures and processes, changes were being introduced at the Secretariat level. The main focus of the newly created Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development was to provide support for the central coordinating and policy-making functions of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, as well as the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly. Its main concerns would be policy development, integrating the economic as well as the social and environmental dimensions of major policy issues such as growth and adjustment, poverty, hunger and malnutrition and the advancement of women; supporting the Secretary-General's efforts to achieve system-wide coordination; providing substantive support to intergovernmental bodies; preparing the World Summit for Social Development and the fourth World Conference on Women; coordinating the follow-up of global conferences; and providing technical secretariat services to relevant intergovernmental bodies.

3. Turning to the question of the follow-up to the Rio Conference, he acknowledged the effective support for the environmental priorities of recipient countries given by UNDP through, inter alia, Capacity 21, the fifth cycle country programmes and its involvement in the Global Environment Facility and other vital activities. He welcomed the range of actions taken by UNDP to enhance its role in the implementation of Agenda 21, by providing catalytic resources, bringing together various actors in the field, and using its capacity to assess technical cooperation requirements and programme technical assistance in priority areas. Through its field offices and the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO), UNDP was also helping to address the urgent problems of desertification and drought, within the framework of an international convention to combat desertification. Increasing UNDP capacity at field level to carry out the important follow-up tasks was of vital importance and he trusted that the proposals on that question before the current session would receive favourable consideration.

(Mr. Desai)

4. On the question of General Assembly resolution 47/199, a full progress report would be submitted to the forthcoming operational segment of the Economic and Social Council. A number of recent measures had been taken at the system-wide level and agreement had been reached on a common interpretation of the programme approach and of national execution, as requested in paragraphs 13 and 22 of the resolution. Initial steps had been taken to ascertain the interest of recipient countries in using the country strategy note, in line with the provisions of paragraph 9. Measures to strengthen the resident coordinator system in accordance with paragraphs 36 to 39 were being considered, while important initiatives had been taken to launch the preparation of a common United Nations system-wide manual, as required by paragraph 33, to increase harmonization and adaptation of programming cycles to cover 80 per cent of the countries by 1996 and to enhance accountability at the field level. The training provisions of the resolution had been reviewed with the aim of extending the introduction of new concepts such as the programme approach and enhancing the coherence and effectiveness of operational activities at the country level. A comprehensive management and work plan had also been developed in consultation with the organizations of the United Nations system.

5. In implementing resolution 47/199, a comprehensive approach was needed that recognized the link between its provisions and those of resolution 44/211, and every effort was being made to achieve that end.

6. Mr. MARENGO (Observer for Seychelles) said that many of the most pressing problems facing humanity were a result of social, political and economic factors beyond the control of individual countries. There was a growing recognition of the need for change and many countries, including his own, had introduced policies more conducive to foreign direct investment, together with growing transparency and liberalization. Yet the prospects for a new era of prosperity and global cooperation remained remote for many developing countries.

7. However, the developing countries could escape from their predicament if the necessary assistance was forthcoming. The structural economic reforms needed for sustainable development had in many cases been introduced and the vital importance of regional and subregional integration had been recognized. In that connection, his country had recently acceded to the Treaty for the establishment of the preferential trade area for Eastern and Southern African States and intended to play an active role in the negotiations to establish a common market among those States.

8. However, development was not just a matter of sound and effective government economic policies, but was also dependent on the building of national capacities and the increased participation of all citizens in political and economic processes. With that in view, his own Government had initiated a bold process of economic and political reforms at all levels of society. The most dramatic aspect of those reforms had been the decision in late 1991 to move away from a State-dominated system, towards a pluralistic multi-party one, combined with measures to liberalize the economy. The approach adopted had been innovative and unique, especially with regard to the level of popular participation in the constitutional process. Since a new constitution was clearly needed, the people of the Seychelles had been asked to elect a

(Mr. Marengo, Observer, Seychelles)

commission to draw up a new constitution. The latter had been put to a referendum in November 1992 but had failed to secure the required 60 per cent majority of the vote. It was decided that the second constitutional commission should be more transparent and open to contributions from the people in order to build a truly national consensus and the Commission's proceedings which were conducted entirely in the national language, Creole were therefore broadcast on radio and television. Submissions were invited from members of the public, church leaders and representatives of minority political parties and every effort was made to ensure that all possible opinions could be taken into account. The resulting document would soon be put to a national referendum and he was confident that the new constitution would provide a sound basis for building on the country's achievements in the social and economic fields, by ensuring a stable and favourable climate for increased domestic and foreign investment and economic diversification.

9. His country's experience could serve as a valuable example and even an inspiration to other countries. A video presentation had been commissioned and would be submitted to UNDP for distribution. That initiative was in line with his country's commitment to promoting the sharing of experience among developing countries, as exemplified by the fact that 10 per cent of its current indicative planning figure had been allocated to the promotion of technical cooperation among developing countries.

10. Nevertheless, the reforms in his country would continue to require assistance if stability was to be maintained and enhanced. International financial institutions should take into account the social needs of developing countries, since the only way to guarantee economic and political stability was to eradicate poverty and enhance the quality of life.

11. His Government fully agreed with UNDP on the importance of the general issues of governance and economic liberalization and hoped that UNDP and the donor community at large would support its own efforts in that area. Although the assistance it received under the country programme was relatively small, it was highly valued, particularly the contribution towards institution-building and the strengthening of national capacities. UNDP and the United Nations development system in general should play an even more active role in promoting and supporting reform, through increased provision of technical assistance for training and human resource development, consultative and advisory services, research, and information on foreign investment. In addition, monitoring reports on financial flows to developing countries should be instituted on a regular basis, with a view to increasing such flows. It was also important to focus on the specific circumstances of each country. It should be remembered that needs were often urgent, requiring immediate action rather than words and he expressed concern at delays in project implementation and of the unnecessary time and money wasted on seemingly irrelevant studies.

12. Mr. CART (Switzerland) said that the Human Development Report 1993 constituted a major contribution and posed several questions regarding UNDP's future role. It was important to determine how UNDP could contribute to creating a climate that was favourable to the implementation of know-how, in particular by the poorer segments of the population. Another area that should

(Mr. Cart, Switzerland)

be explored was how UNDP efforts to improve management capacities could help recipient countries to choose internationally competitive strategies and technologies that would best ensure sustainable development and create jobs. UNDP had moved from a project approach to one that sought to concentrate on priority goals, according to the specific needs of each country, in particular strengthening management capacities and promoting the role of women in development. That new approach should result in development programmes that were prepared by recipient countries themselves, and it required UNDP to adapt its relationship with the specialized agencies that provided operational support. The ultimate goal, however, remained the same, namely, each country must take charge of its own development, while UNDP continued to provide support and overall coordination.

13. Many new challenges had arisen, helping to create a climate of uncertainty with regard to UNDP's future role. Moreover, these challenges had appeared at a time when donor countries were experiencing an acute economic recession and being forced to reduce their development assistance budgets. Consensus needed to be reached in several areas. Firstly, UNDP's unique and central role in, inter alia, maintaining an ongoing dialogue with developing countries should be affirmed. Secondly, its role as local coordinator for the United Nations system as a whole should be reinforced in order to enhance the system's efficiency. Thirdly, it should be recognized that UNDP needed regular and predictable financing over several years if it was to effectively meet its goals. Finally, a more effective governance system should be set up, in the form of a Council, of no more than 30 members, that would meet more often and be more specialized in development and cooperation. In order to ensure that all countries were represented fairly, in might be possible, within regional groups, to set up a rotation system of representation among countries sharing similar views. General meetings, which all countries would be invited to attend, could be held periodically to discuss fundamental issues of general interest.

14. Mr. CHEN Jian (China) said that UNDP should play an important role in establishing a new international economic order based on equality and mutual benefit. His delegation supported the view expressed in the Annual Report of the Administrator for 1992 (DP/1993/11) that international economic and technical cooperation should be aimed at the development priorities of recipient countries in order to obtain maximum results.

15. Capacity 21 was a major capacity-building programme to support recipient countries in their implementation of Agenda 21. UNDP should incorporate its support activities for environmental protection and development under Capacity 21 into the various country programmes. He appealed to the developed countries to make generous financial contributions to Capacity 21. UNDP should help raise the professional level of managerial personnel of the recipient countries, especially in the area of finance. UNDP should adjust the relevant rules and regulations and adopt corresponding measures to encourage national execution. The technical advantages and expertise of specialized agencies should be brought into full play. Country programmes should be formulated on a case-by-case basis, according to the conditions of the recipient countries, to avoid delays resulting from undue emphasis on the programme approach. It was

(Mr. Chen Jian, China)

hoped that UNDP would draw up clear guidelines for the programme approach and simplify programme approval procedures.

16. UNDP should also adopt measures to strengthen technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC), improve the mechanisms for exchange of information and provide more financial resources for project implementation. His Government would continue to explore new channels for cooperation and hoped that the international financial institutions and developed countries would give more substantial support to TCDC activities.

17. Development assistance was aimed at enhancing the capabilities for self-reliance of recipient countries and should be provided without any political conditions. Two factors, namely per capita GNP and population, which reflected the common interest of developing nations, should be maintained as the fundamental criteria for distribution of assistance. Priority should be given to low-income countries, especially the least developed countries and those encountering difficult conditions in development. UNDP should develop new channels for resources so that the interests of the traditional recipient countries would not be affected.

18. Mr. PAENIU (Tuvalu) expressed appreciation for UNDP's assistance to the development efforts of Tuvalu and of the Pacific region as a whole. In view of the significant decrease in resources available under the fifth cycle, he expressed the hope that donor partners would fulfil their financial pledges to UNDP as early as possible. He also hoped that the impact of financial cuts in UNDP's budget would be shared equally by all regions.

19. On the issue of environment and development, Tuvalu had benefited from UNDP's comprehensive environmental programme under the national environmental management strategy project. It would soon benefit from the UNDP-funded bio-diversity programme too. The lack of financial commitment to the Global Environment Facility was disappointing; the Council must work harder to secure donor pledges if UNDP was to fully achieve the objectives of the Facility.

20. The climate change phenomenon was already causing great difficulties for the inhabitants of small low-lying island nations. Perhaps because climate change did not cause immediate alarm to the inhabitants of the industrialized world, their Governments and multinational companies did not feel the need to take action. A discouraging inertia had built up in the developed countries on the environment and development issue.

21. Sustainable development and environmental security were matters of survival in Tuvalu. After exhaustive scientific work by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), very little pragmatic commitment had emerged towards reducing global warming and continued profligate use of fossil fuels by developed nations was boosting the greenhouse effect. The average rate of sea-level rise, according to IPCC, was likely to be 3 to 10 cm per decade, which created an alarming threat to the islands since they were no higher than 2 metres above sea level. It had taken Tuvalu four years to rebuild following cyclone Ofa, in 1990 and the work had still not been completed. Many government research centres in the developed world were of the view that environmental

(Mr. Paeniu, Tuvalu)

degradation was only going to get worse unless greenhouse gas emissions were cut. Scientists who said otherwise were generally those who had close links with the oil companies and other fossil fuel interests.

22. A further problem was that the insurance industry, so central to the economic development of the islands, was increasingly reluctant to provide insurance in view of the negative correlation between development and climate change catastrophes. The impact on island nations heavily dependent on tourism was appalling. In Tuvalu, tourism was one of the few potential sources of development in the twenty-first century. Climate change posed a threat to the sustainability of the trillion-dollar insurance industry, and therefore to the economies of industrialized countries themselves.

23. Tuvalu had consistently called for the cooperation of the industrialized nations in combating global warming. At the second World Climate Conference in 1990, he had warned that the agreements reached were too weak and that science was being ignored, and had pointed to the injustice of small island nations having to face physical and cultural extinction through no fault of their own. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, many island nations had expressed deep disappointment at the watering down of the climate convention.

24. He appealed to industrialized nations and in particular, called on the heads of State of the seven major industrialized countries to take positive action at their forthcoming summit in Tokyo to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change posed a threat to all human beings on earth and time was running out.

25. Mr. BLANK (Germany) fully associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the member States of the European Community.

26. A key element in the world was the new shift towards market economies. His delegation was convinced that market economies could contribute to an increase in human welfare. Market economies incorporated the decentralization of economic and social decisions and activities and could only function within a stable macroeconomic framework. Development cooperation should therefore be geared to building up capacities in the developing countries so that people would be able to participate fully in market economies; that meant better education and training, a more rational distribution of production facilities, and management development, which was of the utmost importance.

27. He commended the Human Development Report, 1993, for its coverage of broad problems, for example in Germany. The report did not shy away from describing circumstances which were normally taboo in international discussion.

28. Development cooperation, particularly technical assistance, was one of the most important fields of action of the United Nations system. Long-term development perspectives resulting from the close North-South policy dialogue were a stable and important factor for peace-keeping in the world. In the industrialized countries, it was important to strengthen awareness of the high

(Mr. Blank, Germany)

priority of development policies; the future of those countries was inextricably linked with the problems of the developing countries.

29. On the question of the future role of UNDP, if UNDP was not able either to implement or to finance an overall interdependent goal of development, it must focus on crucial aspects. Poverty alleviation strategies should be the centre of all development efforts. They should cover education, including basic education, and primary health care. In that process, grass-roots activities and NGO involvement had a key role to play. It was also necessary to determine what kind of contribution UNDP would make to structural adjustment processes, which were increasingly a prerequisite for a new development strategy and flow of resources. UNDP should strengthen the capacities of developing countries to define the goals and design of the structural adjustment process and ensure that the social dimension of the process was funded on a realistic basis.

30. The world-wide economic recession made the discussion of the rational and optimal use of scarce financial resources all the more urgent. The Council could consider whether country programming on the basis of indicative planning figures was still an adequate method.

31. On the question of project and programme implementation, he noted that decentralization required a strong backstopping system. In that context, regional integration and cooperation could be important as a linkage between regional programme activities and a decentralized structure.

32. Capacity-building in the developing countries was a prerequisite for strengthening the absorptive capacity of those countries and independent decision-making. Germany was prepared to disburse DM 10 million in 1993 to help finance Capacity 21; however, it had yet to convince the relevant parliamentary committee that there was fair burden-sharing with other major donors.

33. Mr. JASIŃSKI (Poland) said that the question of people's participation in development should be considered in a broad sense. Increased material or financial support from both donor and recipient countries was essential, but was not the only condition for a successful partnership. All countries must face up to the challenges and opportunities brought around in the post-cold-war era so that they could all share in the achievements which would undoubtedly come from their united efforts and would benefit all groups of countries and all strata of society.

34. Poland was grateful to the Administrator that he had lost no time in helping define the role of UNDP in Poland and other countries in Eastern and Central Europe in the painful but promising transition process. It should be remembered that a 4 per cent increase in GDP in that region translated into a 1 per cent increase for the entire globe. Efforts must be made to help those people achieve and sustain a growth rate of 4 per cent or more. The current fall in production and related economic activity in the region was one reason for the economic stagnation affecting the entire world.

35. His delegation hoped that the materials provided for the session would be used fully at the country and local levels in order to facilitate the genuine

(Mr. Jasinski, Poland)

participation of the people in the development process from the grass roots to the highest levels. An international conference on Poland's experience in technical cooperation, organized by UNDP in September 1992, in which delegations from the Baltic countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States had taken part along with the donor community, Polish institutions and UNDP staff, had had a favourable outcome. Poland was ready to continue sharing its experience in development and transition with interested countries. Unfortunately, in 1992 there had been an appreciable drop in the use of its experts and training facilities by the United Nations system; Poland hoped that its offer of cooperation would be fully used in future. It also hoped to speed the implementation rate of its country programme, which contained many innovative features and counted on closer involvement from United Nations agencies and donor countries. Poland would also be interested in speeding up the rate of implementation of the regional programme for Europe.

36. Poland welcomed UNDP's involvement in the implementation of decisions taken at the Rio Conference and in the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations. It looked forward to cooperating closely with UNDP, the World Bank and UNEP within the Global Environment Facility, as well as Capacity 21. Much remained to be done to rehabilitate the environment in Europe and to stop further deterioration in the Baltic area.

37. There were still many untapped reserves at the national, regional and interregional levels which could be put to constructive use for international technical cooperation provided that the participatory role of partners in development was constantly reviewed and updated. Poland looked forward to working closely with UNDP in devising new modalities in that regard. The network of UNDP offices could be used more fully to share experiences in such new ventures. That would contribute to a more efficient use of scarce resources and would attract new partners for such cooperation. Poland noted with satisfaction the increased cooperation of major donors in the form of cost-sharing in major programmes.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.